

Retreats

Fast Track to Freedom

**A Guide for Leaders
and
Practitioners**

Yogani

From The AYP Enlightenment Series

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This is dedicated to all who gather together
for their spiritual progress,
and for the betterment of humanity.

Introduction

Since Advanced Yoga Practices (AYP) was started in 2003, the number of people utilizing this open source system of full-scope yoga practices has grown steadily around the world. It has evolved from being primarily an internet resource to a shelf-full of books, and now to increasing “real-world” activities including meditation groups, hands-on training, and retreats organized and run by those who choose to share the knowledge and experiences that come with the effective application of the practices. I am most grateful to all who have been sharing the knowledge for the benefit of others.

This small volume has been written to provide guidelines for assisting those who wish to organize and implement AYP retreats. It is also for those interested in attending retreats for personal benefit and for benefiting the world with the cultivation of abiding inner silence, and its natural application in daily living. The experience with AYP retreats has been very good, and this book is offered in the hope that many more retreats will be conducted around the world.

The AYP Enlightenment Series is an endeavor to present the most effective methods of spiritual practice in a series of easy-to-read books that anyone can use to gain practical results immediately and over the long term. For centuries, many of these powerful practices have been shrouded in secrecy, mainly in an effort to preserve them. Now we find ourselves in the

information age, and able to preserve knowledge for present and future generations like never before. The question remains: “How far can we go in effectively transmitting spiritual methods in writing?”

Since the beginning, the writings of AYP have been an experiment to see just how much can be conveyed, with much more detail included on practices than in the spiritual writings of the past. Can books provide us the specific means necessary to tread the path to enlightenment, or do we have to surrender at the feet of a *guru* to find our salvation? Well, clearly we must surrender to something, even if it is to our own innate potential to live a freer and happier life. If we are able to do that, and maintain regular practice, then books like this one can come alive and instruct us in the ways of human spiritual transformation. If the reader is ready and the book is worthy, amazing things can happen.

While one person’s name is given as the author of this book, it is actually a distillation of the efforts of thousands of practitioners over thousands of years. This is one person’s attempt to simplify and make practical the spiritual methods that many have demonstrated throughout history. All who have gone before have my deepest gratitude, as do the many I am privileged to be in touch with in the present who continue to practice with dedication and good results.

I hope you will find this book to be a useful resource as you travel along your chosen path.

Practice wisely, and enjoy!

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Chapter 1 – Why Retreats?

When we begin practicing twice-daily deep meditation, and after some time add on spinal breathing pranayama, there may come a desire to increase our practice time beyond the normal twice-daily 20-30 minutes per session for faster results. Once we have had a taste of that expansive blissful silence within us, and the ecstatic sensations that often come with it, we want more, much more. So what can we do?

Our first impulse may be to increase the time of our sittings – more practice will yield more of those good results, right? More is better!

But if we do this, increase our meditation time beyond 20 minutes and spinal breathing beyond 10 minutes, we will soon find that there is only so much purification and opening our nervous system can handle on any given day, or in any given week. The result? Symptoms of overload, which can bring physical, mental and emotional discomfort, until we can rebalance our practice routine in relation to the reality of our inner capacity for change and the responsibilities we have in daily life.

Having tried that, we may then try adding on more of the AYP practices before we are ready, with similar results. There are plenty available in the AYP writings. However, if we try to build our practice too quickly, we will find that Rome was not built in a day, and neither is our transformation to a life in

abiding inner silence, ecstatic bliss, and the unity of constant outpouring divine love.

Nevertheless our bhakti (spiritual desire) may well be surging all the same, and we have to do something to advance along our path. There is no time to lose.

So what can we do? First, wherever we are in taking on spiritual practices, we should stabilize our daily sittings at a level that is comfortable for our individual characteristics of purification and opening. We call this “self-pacing.” And second, we should introduce any additions in practices one at a time in a measured way, so as to avoid the excesses that can occur when we rush ahead too fast.

Finally, we should consider going on a retreat. Not just any retreat, though there are many kinds that can be beneficial, but an AYP retreat, which can add a great leap in our progress, without the symptoms of overdoing that can occur when we try to move ahead too fast with our practices at home. This is accomplished with precise scheduling of multiple practice sessions in a group setting, balanced with light activity in the form of meetings, meals and walking. With all of our needs attended to in a well-organized retreat environment, we can achieve high levels of purification and opening that will give us a deep abiding inner silence that will stay with us long after we have come home from the retreat.

Retreats provide an additional layer of practice that we can renew several times per year, resulting in

accelerated progress for ourselves, and for all who are influenced by our rising enlightenment.

Retreat Basics

What are we doing when we go on an AYP retreat?

The first thing we are doing is leaving our responsibilities behind and going into an environment where there is only one priority – to systematically go deep into inner silence for the duration of the retreat, and relax and enjoy while doing it. In doing so, we will be able to cultivate a lot of purification and opening in our nervous system, and a dramatic deepening of abiding inner silence (witness) that will underlie and permeate all that we will do when we go back to normal responsibilities in our daily life.

The process that occurs on a retreat is not an intellectual learning or knowledge discipline. It is more of an unlearning that occurs as we surrender to the retreat schedule, gentle guidance of the retreat leaders, and the rise of a pervasive inner silence as we engage in our practices. The schedule will include group practice and, depending on retreat length and type, may include more than two practice sessions per day.

It is our own practices that we use when we go on retreat. If we are new to spiritual practices, the retreat will include instructions in deep meditation, spinal breathing pranayama, and basic asanas (postures), which are the core practices used on a retreat. If we

are attending an advanced retreat, we may have the opportunity to receive instructions for additional practices covered in the AYP writings, such as samyama, mudras, bandhas, self-inquiry and other components of advanced practice.

Once we are on a retreat and the initial orientation and training are taken care of, then we follow the schedule for taking us gradually into deeper inner silence during the course of our stay. During this time, we may feel like we are being permeated with abiding inner silence, becoming “thick” with it, as though we are moving in it throughout the retreat. We may also experience various symptoms of purification and opening occurring at deep levels within us. We may be emotionally tearful at times, and giddy and laughing at other times. We may feel a sense of peace that surpasses all understanding. It can be anything. What we do know is that we are unloading accumulated deep stress and obstructions, and that we are going to feel much clearer as a result.

Like sitting practices at home, when we go on a retreat, it is not primarily for the experience during the retreat, though this can be and often is wonderful. But it is more for the results that we find in our life after the retreat – more stillness, peace, creativity, energy and an improved quality of life in all the things we are doing. While the results of our daily practice at home may be felt for some hours after each session, and gradually building up as a resident experience of abiding inner silence over time, the

results of a retreat may be felt for months and longer. As we go on periodic retreats, we will notice a larger and longer cycle of unfoldment building underneath our daily cycle of practice. Retreats add a new dimension of progress in that way, a larger and deeper cycle of spiritual progress.

So when we say that retreats are a “fast track to freedom,” we really mean it. All of the aspects of spiritual progress we have been discussing throughout the AYP writings become accelerated when we add on retreats several times each year.

Retreats are an element of practice that will take us to the next level, with a degree of support and stability on our path that will enhance our daily practice at home, and the steadily increasing joy we experience in daily living.

The Magic of Group Practice

It has been said that “there is strength in numbers.”

We all know that this is true, particularly when it comes to spiritual practice. There is the famous saying attributed to Jesus:

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

This does not have to be viewed from a sectarian perspective. It simply means, when people gather for a spiritual purpose, there is a multiplying effect, with

the spiritual influence of the whole being much greater than the sum of the spiritual influence of the individual participants. In other words, the divine presence is amplified in the group.

In the case of an AYP retreat, we are talking about group practice for cultivating abiding inner silence, and the effect in the group is very noticeable.

While a group located in one place has a pronounced effect on all who are there, the effect of group activities can also be felt when the participants are separated by great distances. With AYP having its origin on the internet, the phenomenon of group dynamics has been felt by many around the world, whether it be in informal online communications, or the several modes of coordinated “global” group practice that have been occurring over the years. The effects of time-synchronized practice have been felt by many, even when practitioners have been spread all over the world.

On a retreat, where practitioners are gathered together in one physical place, and practicing together utilizing a specially-designed schedule, the results will be tremendously amplified. Not only tremendously amplified, but also tremendously stabilized. So the results will be much more than with individual practice, and much less likely to be accompanied by the discomforts and stability issues that can occur when individual practice at home is pressed to the limit. This is the magic of group practice.

How does this happen? Perhaps it has something to do with the resonance of consciousness at deep levels of stillness in the mind and nervous system. No one knows for sure. It can only be said that it has long been known that the inner dynamic of a group gathered for spiritual practice is far greater than the dynamic of a single individual practicing. It has to do with the coalescing of inner silence and radiating ecstatic energies that are cultivated by a group of practitioners. In this situation, the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts, not only for the practitioners involved, but also in terms of the uplifting influence that can be felt for great distances around the location where the practices are occurring.

Such effects are lasting, and can be felt especially in places where practices have been engaged in, even long after the practitioners have gone home from the retreat. Places where group spiritual practices have been engaged in many times over many years may become “holy” places, noted for having uplifting vibrations that can be felt by many. This can be the case centuries after the original spiritual practices there have ended. Such places may become the focus of pilgrimages, which can also uplift the vibrations in that location.

So group practice can have an expansive positive influence in both time and space. For our purposes, we are looking for practical results that can benefit us in daily living, and help uplift many around the world. We can help others by helping ourselves.

Group practice is a good way to give ourselves a boost, whether it is at a weekly group meditation gathering, or on a retreat. The results can be far-reaching.

While it is possible to do a “solo retreat” from time to time and gain benefits, the biggest payoff from a retreat will come from the inner dynamics of group practice. So whenever we can get away to a retreat involving group practice, with good organization and leadership, the advice is to do it.

Short Term and Long Term Benefits

Why do retreats? Because they work for the individual, the group, and the surrounding environment, not only in the present, but with substantial residual positive effects lasting long into the future.

As the influence (initial contrast) of a retreat wears off over weeks and months after we get home, we find ourselves with a stable level of abiding inner silence beyond what we had before going on retreat. Then the next time we go on retreat, we can repeat the cycle of deep cultivation of abiding inner silence, and its integration in daily activity afterward, leading to a further increased base of inner silence. And so it goes, deeper and deeper, or higher and higher, depending on how we might view the cultivation of permanent abiding inner silence in our life.

Now let’s take a closer look at the dynamics of what happens on a retreat.

Further Reading and Support

Yogani is an American spiritual scientist who, for forty years, has been integrating ancient techniques from around the world which cultivate human spiritual transformation. The approach is non-sectarian, and open to all. His books include:

Advanced Yoga Practices – Easy Lessons for Ecstatic Living (Two Volumes)

Two large user-friendly textbooks providing over 400 detailed lessons on the AYP integrated system of practices.

The Secrets of Wilder – A Novel

The story of young Americans discovering and utilizing actual secret practices leading to human spiritual transformation.

The AYP Enlightenment Series

Easy-to-read instruction books on yoga practices, including:

- ***Deep Meditation – Pathway to Personal Freedom***
- ***Spinal Breathing Pranayama – Journey to Inner Space***
- ***Tantra – Discovering the Power of Pre-Orgasmic Sex***
- ***Asanas, Mudras and Bandhas – Awakening Ecstatic Kundalini***
- ***Samyama – Cultivating Stillness in Action, Siddhis and Miracles***
- ***Diet, Shatkarmas and Amaroli – Yogic Nutrition and Cleansing for Health and Spirit***
- ***Self-Inquiry – Dawn of the Witness and the End of Suffering***
- ***Bhakti and Karma Yoga – The Science of Devotion and Liberation Through Action***
- ***Eight Limbs of Yoga – The Structure and Pacing of Self-Directed Spiritual Practice***
- ***Retreats – Fast Track to Freedom – A Guide for Leaders and Practitioners***
- ***Liberation – The Fruition of Yoga***

For up-to-date information on the writings of Yogani, and for the free *AYP Support Forums*, please visit:

www.advancedyogapractices.com